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MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Naval Combat Operations Employing Only Conventional Means of Destruction

Naval Combat Operations Employing Only Conventional Means of Destruction

by

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A modern nuclear war may begin and be waged for a period of time with conventional means of destruction alone, and it is extremely difficult to predict the precise moment when a non-nuclear period will develop into a nuclear period.

Consequently, throughout the period when the opposing sides are employing conventional weapons, they must be in a state of constant readiness to employ nuclear means and to eliminate the effects of nuclear strikes. This gives rise to a duality of requirements in the organization and conduct of combat actions: the constant threat of a surprise nuclear attack compels our forces and means to operate in dispersed combat dispositions, while the necessity of destroying the enemy by means of conventional weapons engenders the requirement that their efforts be concentrated in comparatively narrow sectors. How can this contradiction be resolved?

Without attempting to set forth exhaustive recommendations for the resolution of this contradiction, let us examine the procedures which can be employed in certain situations. As a specific example, we shall attempt to determine the number of aircraft and gun-equipped surface vessels required to neutralize a US motorized infantry division defending a 60 to 100 kilometer coastal strip against an amphibious landing, if the landing force is composed of a motorized rifle division reinforced by a naval infantry regiment and the landing front is 10, 20, 30 kilometers long. Let us assume that the anti-landing coastal defense is set up on the principle of mobile defense, that as much as 50 percent of the defended area is accessible to amphibious landings, and that the landing force can be successfully landed if as much as 60 percent of the enemy reserves and platoon strongpoints on the forward edge of the anti-landing defense and no less than 75 percent of the artillery batteries in the landing area, are neutralized. The neutralization of enemy forces and means in the forward defensive area of the beach and at the forward edge of the anti-landing defense is carried out by gun-equipped ships, each of which has four 130-mm guns, and by front bombers (fighter-bombers) belonging to the air army of the maritime front. One gun-equipped ship is designated for each platoon strongpoint covering an area of five hectares. Front aviation is responsible for the neutralization of the divisional reserves. 50X1-HUM

Analysis of the calculations made for the conditions we have stated (and presented in the table) demonstrates that in actuality the number of aircraft required to neutralize an anti-landing defense does not depend on the width of the landing front. One bomber (fighter-bomber) division is needed to support the landing of an amphibious force (if there is an average of 1.5 aircraft sorties a day, which is fully practicable). Since the landing is usually carried out during a troop offensive on the maritime axis, it is quite reasonable to assume that the front will not be able to supply the necessary air strength for its support on the very day of the landing. When this is the case, it will be necessary to have aviation forces and means conduct preliminary neutralization of the anti-landing defense two or three days preceding the beginning of the landing of the amphibious force.

The table also shows that, should the force be landed on a broad front (20 - 30 kilometers), the navy obviously would not have available the number of gun-equipped ships necessary to provide fire support and to support the actions on the shore.

Therefore, analysis of the calculations leads to the conclusion that it is advisable to land a force composed of a reinforced motorized rifle division on a relatively narrow front (no more than 10 kilometers). In order to gain superiority over the enemy, it is very important that the landings be made at the fastest pace possible. For this purpose, use should be made of high speed transport-landing craft and landing craft such as helicopter carriers, launches on air cushions and hydrofoils, and amphibious equipment for ground forces. If the amphibious equipment of the ground forces (armored personnel carriers, armored vehicles, amphibious motor transport vehicles, etc.) is equipped with hydrofoils, the pace of landings could be increased by a factor of almost 6 or 7.

Equipping ships with rocket launchers would greatly facilitate gaining fire superiority over the enemy. Calculations demonstrate that when 140-mm caliber free rockets are employed, each ship, with its 10 to 12 automatic launchers (800 launching rails), when firing from a distance of 10 kilometers upon a 48 hectare area, can create a density of fire of approximately 10 to 12 rockets per hectare, which is the equivalent of employing 4 or 5 gun-equipped ships.

Naval operations that employ conventional means of destruction against enemy strike groupings at sea while under the threat of enemy employment of nuclear weapons, present problems of a somewhat different magnitude than those involved in the support of an amphibious landing. 50X1-HUM

It takes 6 to 10 hits by air-launched missiles or 12 to 15 hits by submarine torpedos to put ships such as strike aircraft carriers out of action. A sizable amount of forces, such as a minimum of two naval missile-carrying aviation regiments, is required to achieve that many hits.

At the same time, because of the continual threat of enemy employment of nuclear weapons, a certain part of the naval missile-carrying aircraft must be maintained in a state of readiness for sorties with nuclear missiles. As a result, the task of destroying enemy aircraft carrier groupings with conventional weapons can be fulfilled only partially. To successfully and fully fulfil this task, it will be necessary either to increase the complement of naval missile-carrying aviation (for example, by creating a reserve of the Naval High Command), or by making wide use of inter-theater moves of aviation and, besides, to use long-range aviation for this purpose.

A different situation also arises when submarines are employed against enemy strike groupings. Because of the threat of enemy employment of nuclear weapons, and the long period of time required by submarines to deploy in areas of combat operations, each submarine will have to carry a prescribed number of nuclear missiles or torpedos. This means that submarines will have fewer rockets and torpedos with conventional charges than they could have. Consequently, in order to destroy enemy strike groupings at sea, more submarines will have to be called upon.

Combat with missile submarines has also become more difficult. In order to destroy the largest possible number of enemy missile submarines prior to the time nuclear weapons are used, we must make maximum effective use of our antisubmarine forces. Since each aircraft and helicopter can handle only a relatively small quantity of antisubmarine weapons while they are simultaneously carrying nuclear munitions on board, their combat capabilities during non-nuclear operations are sharply reduced; we therefore consider it advisable to have readied nuclear munitions at the airfields of antisubmarine aviation or on antisubmarine helicopter carriers. Then the transition to the use of nuclear weapons can be accomplished by sending regular aircraft (helicopters) to carry out missions with nuclear munitions on board.

Unfortunately, antisubmarine submarines, like those of any other type, have lower combat capabilities during the period of non-nuclear combat actions than they would have if they carried only conventional munitions on board. A similar situation exists with surface antisubmarine ships. However, it is true that, because they carry a large number of munitions in their unit of fire, their combat capabilities are decreased to a somewhat

lesser degree than those of submarines. The decrease in the combat and operational capabilities of the antisubmarine forces can be somewhat compensated for (and comparatively quickly, besides) by moving antisubmarine aviation from other theaters. 50X1-HUM

The problems examined in this article permit the following conclusions to be drawn:

-- the basic ways to resolve the contradiction between the need to conduct combat actions in dispersed combat dispositions to effect an amphibious landing and the need to concentrate efforts in a narrow landing sector, can be: by extensively employing front aviation and gun and mortar-equipped ships to neutralize the anti-landing defense; by echeloning landing force detachments in depth; and by increasing the pace of debarkation;

-- the swift debarkation of the landing force will be greatly furthered by equipping amphibious troop equipment with hydrofoils, by employing high-speed landing craft, and by including helicopter carriers in the composition of the landing forces;

-- naval missile-carrying aircraft have the main burden of destroying enemy aircraft carrier strike groupings, and it is extremely important that they be moved from other theaters for this purpose;

-- the most practical method of raising the operational and combat capabilities of the antisubmarine forces is to increase the number of antisubmarine aircraft, antisubmarine submarines, and antisubmarine surface ships;

-- all other factors being equal, during non-nuclear combat actions the side (large unit, unit) that is better equipped with more sophisticated conventional weapons will have the advantage. This final observation is elementary, but it must be made in order to focus attention once again on the need to further modernize conventional weapons and the methods of employing them. 50X1-HUM

Chart

Number of Fire Support Ships and Front Aviation Aircraft Needed to Support the Landing of an Amphibious Force Composed of a Reinforced Motorized Rifle Division

	Objectives to be Neutralized	Number of Targets in an Anti-Landing Defense Front of 60 km			Number of Targets in an Anti-Landing Defense Front of 100 km			Required Contingent of Forces in an Anti-Landing Defense Front of 60 km			Required Contingent of Forces in an Anti-Landing Defense Front of 100 km		
		Landing Force Front, km			Landing Force Front, km			Landing Force Front, km			Landing Force Front, km		
		10	20	30	10	20	30	10	20	30	10	20	30
Forward Defensive Area	155 mm self-propelled howitzer batteries	6	12	18	4	8	11	5	9	14	3	6	9
	152 mm stationary shore batteries	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
	Platoon defensive points	9-12	19-24	27-36	5-7	11-14	16-22	5-7	11-14	16-22	3-4	7-8	10-13
	Tank battalion	one			one			From 11-22 bombers with OKhAB-100, or from 36 to 108 bombers with RBK-250, and also armed with PTAB-2.5; or 24 fighter-bombers.					
	Honest John batteries	two			two			12 fighter-bombers with rocket and cannon armament.					
	203 mm self-propelled howitzer batteries	two			two			12 fighter-bombers with rocket and cannon armament.					
Divisional Reserve Area	Tank battalions	three-five						From 33-54* to 65-108**bombers with OKhAB-100, or from 108-180* to 354-540**bombers with RBK-250, and also armed with PTAB-2.5; or from 60* to 108**fighter-bombers with rocket and cannon armament.					
	Motorized infantry battalions	one-two						From 9-18* to 13-36**bombers with OKhAB-100, or from 11-22* to 22-43**bombers with RBK-250, and also armed with AO-1; or from 24*-48** fighter-bombers with rocket and cannon armament.					

Number of aircraft required when: * the bombing altitude is 2-3 km
** the bombing altitude is 10-12 km